

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 002581

SIPDIS

NSC FOR CBARTON
USCINCSO ALSO FOR POLAD
STATE PASS USAID FOR DCHA/OTI

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/12/2014

TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [VE](#)

SUBJECT: VENEZUELA: CARTER CENTER BRIEFS AMBASSADORS

Classified By: Political Counselor Abelardo A. Arias for reason 1.5 (d)

Summary

1. (C) Carter Center delegation representatives, including former Argentine President Raul Alfonsin and former Costa Rican President Rodrigo Carazo, met with resident ambassadors August 10 to discuss the Carter Center's role as international observers of the referendum. They outlined observation mechanics and discussed the political dimension of the mission. The ambassadors voiced concern about the polarization and potential for violence as well as the politicization of the CNE. Following the meeting, many of them also expressed concern that Alfonsin seemed willing to bless the vote, no matter the process. Diez later stressed to poloff that former President Carter would not/not certify results unless he felt confident in the judgment. End Summary.

Carter Center Briefs on Observation Mechanics

2. (C) Acting as heads of The Carter Center (TCC) observation mission until former President Carter arrives in Caracas August 13, former Presidents Alfonsin and Carazo briefed resident ambassadors August 10 on the Carter Center's preparation for the referendum. TCC representative in Caracas Francisco Diez and head of TCC's technical observation effort Edgardo Mimica also participated. They explained they are operating under "minimum conditions" but that they expect to have the capacity to observe the installation of the voting machines, visit various voting centers throughout the day, observe the closing of the polls, and the counting and transmission of the results.

3. (C) The Carter Center observer mission is comprised of observers from 14 different countries arriving August 11-13. Diez and Mimica told the ambassadors they were not used to restrictions on the number of observers in their missions and hoped to have at least enough TCC observers for teams of two to travel to each of the 24 states in Venezuela, plus an extra team for Caracas. They said they were working with the National Electoral Council (CNE) to expand the TCC mission to match the size of the Organization of American States (OAS) mission comprised of 68. Diez later told the Ambassador the Carter Center received the number of observers they sought.

4. (C) The mission includes technical observers who will work with OAS technicians as well as with SMARTMATIC and CANTV representatives operating the fingerprint and voting machines. Mimica said the TCC had a "superficial review" of the machines and was impressed by the advanced technology. He warned, however, that the machines were not programmed with the latest voting registration. Therefore, approximately two million new registered voters would have to vote by paper ballot. Asked if they will be able to carry out a quick count, the TCC representatives said yes, but it would just be for the mission to verify the results tabulated by the CNE.

TCC Discusses Political Dimension of the Mission

5. (C) Many of the ambassadors expressed their concern about polarization and the fact that neither the opposition nor the government is prepared to lose the referendum. Alfonsin said such polarization happens in every country in every election throughout Latin America. The Mexican and Chilean ambassador emphasized that there is a possibility of violence on the part of the state, referring to VP Jose Vincente Rangel's threat of violence if the opposition releases its preliminary numbers before the CNE. Alfonsin responded that former Argentine President Eduardo Duhalde was here in Caracas and

met with all the political parties to ensure a fair and peaceful process. Diez acknowledged the possibility of violence but noted that the campaign period had not been

nearly as volatile as expected.

16. (C) The Chilean ambassador raised the issue of CNE politicization, noting that its bias toward the GOV would make the observation mission very difficult. The Costa Rican ambassador added that there were some who thought the Carter Center would not be willing to confront the CNE if it had to. Alfonsin and Carazo acknowledged the concern and said they are here to facilitate and give the Venezuelan people confidence in the process. Mimica acknowledged the difficult job and expressed regret that the experienced hands from the European Union were not there with them.

17. (C) Diez later told poloff that there would be pressure on the international observers to certify the results, whether or not they have had sufficient information, but that former President Carter would not/not certify results unless he felt confident in the judgment. Diez also told poloff he did not think the GOV would attempt any "tricks" with so many international observers and journalists as well as the Venezuelan press and the recently CNE- accredited national observers from "Ojo Electoral" watching the process. He said it would also be difficult for the GOV to play games with six former heads of state, including Presidents Carter, Alfonsin, Carazo, Duhalde, Cesar Gaviria, and Belisario Betancur, in Venezuela. He said they would meet together with President Chavez August 14.

Ambassador Reiterates U.S. Policy

18. (C) Referring to the August 6 Financial Times article, Alfonsin asked the Ambassador if U.S. policy toward Venezuela or the referendum had changed. The Ambassador responded that our policy has been consistent, supporting a fair and transparent referendum process. He explained to Alfonsin and the ambassadors that the U.S. has emphasized the importance of international observation and supported the efforts of the Carter Center and the OAS for that reason.

Comment

19. (C) The Carter Center briefing left us and other ambassadors with the impression that Alfonsin and Carazo are willing to accept anything from the CNE and GOV. Left unsaid but understood was also their presumption that Chavez would win the referendum. With Alfonsin and Carazo seemingly unwilling to confront the CNE and outgoing OAS SYG Gaviria seemingly taking a back-seat to OAS mission head Pecly Moreira, it could be up to former President Carter - and Carter alone - to call the election.
Shapiro

NNNN
2004CARACA02581 - CONFIDENTIAL